



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

MEMORANDUM

November 2, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: High Quality Early Childhood Inclusion #22-24

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-24 is likely to advance equity in the County, but a lack of disaggregated data makes it difficult to determine to what extent these strategies would also advance racial equity among students of color with disabilities. The creation of two inclusion coach positions brings Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) into further alignment with the vision laid out in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B, and will expand early childhood educational opportunities for children with disabilities. High-quality early childhood inclusion, as with other efforts to advance equity, will also create benefits for non-disabled early learners.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriation #22-24 will provide \$251,233 to the MCPS FY22 Operating Budget to enhance services offered to prekindergarten students with disabilities in MCPS by expanding opportunities for inclusion in general education environments. The funds will support two positions, known as inclusion coaches, that will coordinate with prekindergarten teachers at ten schools with high enrollment of prekindergarten students with disabilities. The goal of this funding is aligned with the goals of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, “providing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities, ages three through 21.”¹

¹ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. State Formulas. Available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/state-formula-grants/>

There is a well-documented and growing body of evidence supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education early-learning/prekindergarten environments. A 2015 (rereleased in 2017) joint policy statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education explains the legal, scientific, and social justice basis for expanding high-quality disability inclusion policies and practices in early childhood programs². From “degrees of belongingness”³ to accessing early childhood curriculum⁴, research points to a number of benefits of inclusion for early learners with disabilities. Specifically, spending more time in general education classes is linked to fewer days absent from school, higher reading and math test scores, higher probability of employment and higher earnings⁵.

Principles underlying inclusive high-quality early childhood opportunities are “access”, “participation”, and “support”⁶. As with other policy areas, advancing equity accrues benefits to all. Strategies that embody these principles create significant benefits for the academic, social, emotional, and physical well-being of students with disabilities as well as their non-disabled peers⁷.

Within the larger context of education equity, there are also concerns about the ways in which racial bias in education systems can lead to students of color being misidentified as needing special education, then being placed in more restrictive settings and experiencing harsher discipline—all linked to the intersectionality of race and special education⁸. A National Center for Learning Disabilities report cites research from the Century Foundation explaining that, “placement decisions that segregate students only work to exacerbate achievement gaps, as researchers have found that students in general education classrooms have better academic and employment outcomes than students placed in separate spaces”⁹.

² US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education. Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs. Originally released September 14, 2015 (rereleased on January 5, 2017).

Available at:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/policy_statement_on_inclusion_of_children_with_disabilities_in_early.pdf.

³ Mary Beth Bruder, Ph.D. and Michael J. Guralnick, Ph.D. Administration for Community Living Blog. Why Early Childhood Inclusion Improves Outcomes for Children with Disabilities. September 17, 2015. Available at: <https://acl.gov/news-and-events/acl-blog/why-early-childhood-inclusion-improves-outcomes-children-disabilities>

⁴ Readiness Matters: 2019-2020 Kindergarten Readiness Report. The Maryland State Department of Education and Ready at Five. March 2020. Available at:

https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/4/200178_ready5_book_web.pdf

⁵ Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs.

⁶ Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. What is Early Childhood Inclusion?. Available at:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/eci/about>

⁷ Readiness Matters: 2019-2020 Kindergarten Readiness Report.

⁸ National Center for Learning Disabilities. Significant Disproportionality in Special Education: Current Trends and Actions for Impact. October 2020. Available at: https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-NCLED-Disproportionality-Trends-and-Actions-for-Impact_FINAL-1.pdf

⁹ Significant Disproportionality in Special Education: Current Trends and Actions for Impact.

Despite the guarantees of IDEA, Part B there are still many students with disabilities and families in the US that experience barriers to accessing inclusive high-quality early childhood programs and “too many preschool children with disabilities are only offered the option of receiving special education services in settings separate from their peers without disabilities.”¹⁰ Further, some Critical Disability Studies scholars suggest that existing definitions of ‘inclusion’ used to encourage disability-inclusive classrooms are limited, and that the real aim should not stop at enhancing inclusion strategies but should aim to “detect, understand and dismantle exclusion as it presents itself in education”¹¹. While full exploration of this critique is beyond the scope of this racial equity impact assessment, it is useful to view early childhood disability inclusion as an important, but intermediary step towards creating truly equitable and socially just educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

In Maryland, a lack of inclusion has contributed to disparities in kindergarten readiness¹² among students with disabilities. The 2019-2020 Readiness Matters Report for Maryland shows disparities across all domains of readiness between children with and without disabilities, reporting that 19% of kindergarteners with a disability demonstrated readiness, compared to 50% of their non-disabled peers¹³. The disparities are similar to those experienced by Black and Hispanic children—42% and 26% respectively demonstrated readiness, while 60% of White kindergartners demonstrated readiness¹⁴. Montgomery County 2019 data show that 12% of children with identified disabilities demonstrated kindergarten readiness compared to 58% of children without disabilities¹⁵, this gap is wider than it is at the state level¹⁶.

Expansion of high-quality inclusive educational opportunities is the responsibility of federal, state and local early learning policies and systems. At the local level, special attention is given to building the capacity of staff and ensuring they have “competencies in culturally and linguistically responsive practice, and positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and disability” along with “a strong understanding of universal design and universal design for

¹⁰ Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs.

¹¹ Nicole Eilers. Critical Disability Studies and ‘Inclusive’ Early Childhood Education: The Ongoing Divide. *Journal of Disability Studies in Education*. July 2020. Available at: https://brill.com/view/journals/jdse/1/1-2/article-p64_64.xml?language=en#d22851984e813. Original quote referenced is from Slee, R. (2013). How do we make inclusive education happen when exclusion is a political predisposition? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(8), 895–907.

¹² The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is a developmentally appropriate assessment tool administered to incoming kindergarteners that measures school readiness across four learning domains. Administered by kindergarten teachers at the beginning of the school year, the KRA looks at the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to be successful in kindergarten. For more information, see about the KRA: <https://dataexplorer.readyatfive.org/#/main>

¹³ Readiness Matters: 2019-2020 Kindergarten Readiness Report.

¹⁴ Readiness Matters: 2019-2020 Kindergarten Readiness Report.

¹⁵ 2019 Maryland Kindergarten Readiness Data. Subgroup Demographics & Readiness. Available at: <https://dataexplorer.readyatfive.org/#/main/county/Montgomery>

¹⁶ 2019 Maryland Kindergarten Readiness Data. Compare Readiness by Subgroup. Available at: <https://dataexplorer.readyatfive.org/#/main/compare-subgroup>

learning”¹⁷. There are a variety of staff development approaches; inclusion coaches are referenced in state level strategies for California and Minnesota¹⁸.

III. **DATA ANALYSIS:** The 42nd annual Report to Congress on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act¹⁹ contains data about who is served under IDEA at the state level, including the education settings of 3–5-year-old children served in Maryland under Part B. Based on available data, 6.6% of 3–5-year-old children in Maryland were served by IDEA, Part B in 2018, this is up from 5.6% in 2009.

The racial/ethnic makeup of 3–5-year-old students served under IDEA, Part B, in Maryland, 2018 is as follows:

American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic /Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or more Races
9.3%	6.9%	7.1%	6.7%	13.7%	6.4%	5.3%

Source: U.S. Department of Education. 42nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 2020. Available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/42nd-arc-for-idea.pdf> Exhibit 59.

The distribution of educational settings for the 3-5-year-old students served under IDEA, Part B in Maryland, 2018 is as follows:

Educational environment	Percentage of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA, Part B	Percentage of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA, Part B who are English Language Learners
At least 10 hours per week and majority	52.9%	57.3%
At least 10 hours per week, majority elsewhere	6.6%	4.1%
Less than 10 hours per week and majority	6.7%	3.1%
Less than 10 hours per week, majority elsewhere	4.1%	1.1%

¹⁷ Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs.

¹⁸ Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Education. 42nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 2020. Available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/42nd-arc-for-idea.pdf>

Educational environment	Percentage of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA, Part B	Percentage of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA, Part B who are English Language Learners
Separate class	18.1%	24.1%
Separate school	2.0%	0.6%
Residential Facility	Percentage was non-zero but less than 0.05	0.0%
Home	.4%	0.6%
Service provider location	9.1%	9.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Education. 42nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 2020. Available at:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/42nd-arc-for-idea.pdf> Exhibit 60 and 61.

This data is useful in understanding the current scope of early childhood disability inclusion at the state level—more than half of students ages 3-5 served by IDEA, Part B are engaged in a regular early childhood program; the same is true for English Language Learners. However, the lack of disaggregation by race and ethnicity and absence of county-level data including estimates for total number of children who are or could be IDEA, Part B eligible makes it difficult to determine whether existing activities in Montgomery County could be considered inclusive or having achieved free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for prekindergartners with disabilities.

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive
Dr. Monifa McKnight, Interim Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools